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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0101
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1822
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1390
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1590
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0537
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0945
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI: REPORTED PLAN TO REMOVE BAINIMARAMA; CHANCES
UNCERTAIN

REF: SUVA 473

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Another counter-coup rumor, with a degree of detail

11. (C) On Oct. 2, Ballu Khan, a controversial Indo-Fijian businessman, met with the Australian High Commissioner to Fiji. Khan owns IT businesses and has close ties to the Qaranivalu, the high chief of Naitasiri Province who was convicted of fomenting a mutiny against Commodore Bainimarama in November 2000 and who was released from prison pending a new trial a few months ago. Khan also has as personal bodyguards several former members of the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) group, elements of which took part in the 2000 mutiny. The Fiji military harassed Khan after the 2006 coup. In the meeting yesterday, Khan reported that former-military elements are collaborating with current-military elements, including an Army Major, for a surgical removal of Bainimarama and his group in the near term, perhaps during Fiji Day celebrations this weekend, certainly before Oct. 31. The Constitution would be abrogated, presumably to facilitate also removing President Iloilo. Acting Chief Justice Gates would depart as well. Khan said the intention after the counter-coup is to set up a civilian-led interim government (IG) pending fresh elections. Very possibly former Vice President Madraiwiwi would be asked to serve as interim President. Another source reports a rumor that Madraiwiwi has asked former Speaker of Parliament Pita Nacuva to serve as interim VP. Khan reported that deposed PM Qarase is not expected to have a role in the post-counter-coup administration, as the Qaranivalu has not been pleased by Qarase's passiveness in recent months.

12. (C) Khan also said that senior Fiji military officer LtCol. Tevita Mara asked to visit the Qaranivalu recently. The Qaranivalu decided to preempt that by going to the the military camp. At the meeting, Mara reportedly warned that the Qaranivalu and Khan would both end up as "collateral damage" if there is any counter-coup attempt.

Comment

13. (C) As noted reftel, rumors are circulating in Suva of a move to oust Bainimarama. That is not surprising, given the economic decline since December and the continuing unhappiness in the ethnic-Fijian community about the interim government. The recent IG efforts to "reform" the Great Council of Chiefs and the mention in Bainimarama's speech at the UNGA of an intent to eliminate communal voting would seem to signal to the traditional Fijian elite that it must act to protect traditional Fijian interests, including over land

rights. Bainimarama's indications that he will not permit an election until he has completed his reforms and that Fijian nationalists, people like Qarase and the Qaranivalu, will not be allowed to run in any future election would accent to the traditional Fijian elite that the only option is a counter-coup. Whether Khan's report reflects a real plan and, if so, how it would turn out remain unclear, and very likely would not become clear until tested by implementation.

The percolating unhappiness in the Fijian community explains the recent re-imposition of public-emergency regulations (PER). Bainimarama's overseas trip, the reported Mara-Qaranivalu meeting, and reports from the IG that the PER will be allowed to lapse again later this week suggest a sense of confidence within the RFMF leadership that it can handle any threat.

U.S. interests

14. (C) The U.S. public announcement for Fiji continues to caution American citizens about travel here and to warn Americans already here to stay away from large gatherings or public disturbances. The Embassy Suva EAC met today, considered the uncertainties, and judged that, as of now, the current public announcement remains sufficient. We will stay alert and keep our contingency plans at the ready, including by continuing to test emergency procedures. If a counter-coup does take place, the U.S. interest will remain to see the rapid return of a freely elected democratic government.

DINGER